

"Glebe House" (Bishop Robert Smith House)
No. 6 Glebe Street
Charleston
Charleston County
South Carolina

HABS No. SC-261
HABS
54
10-CHAR,
169-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia 6, Pennsylvania

"GLEBE HOUSE"
(BISHOP ROBERT SMITH HOUSE)

Address: No. 6 Glebe Street, Charleston, Charleston County,
South Carolina.

Present Owner
and Occupant: College of Charleston, Charleston, South Carolina.

Present Use: The ground floor is now leased by a dental laboratory; the upper floors are not in use. The College proposes restoring the house as a residence for the college president.

Brief Statement
of Significance: A fine eighteenth-century mansion which was the home of the first Episcopal Bishop of South Carolina, and nucleus of the College of Charleston.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: Built on church lands (hence the name "glebe") by St. Philip's Church as a residence for the rector; sold to the College of Charleston in April 1957.
2. Date of erection: About 1770.
3. Notes on alterations and additions: In relatively modern times a small wooden wing was added to the two upper floors to provide a bathroom on each floor. The main entrance has been altered (see below, under "old views").
4. Sources of information: Manuscript by Mrs. John Leland (wife of the director of development, College of Charleston), based upon the News and Courier, Charleston, S. C., April 29, 1957.
5. Important old views:
 - a. A plan of the city of Charleston, from a survey taken by E. Petrie in 1788, shows a building and an out-building on the site of the Glebe House. This plan is reproduced in Simons, Lapham and Stoney, Charleston, South Carolina, Vol. I in The Octagon Library of Early American Architecture (New York: Press of the A.I.A., 1927).

- b. A photograph of the main entrance, reproduced in the same volume [Simons, Lapham and Stoney, op. cit.], shows a plain arched masonry opening, but marks on the brickwork indicate that something had once covered the jambs and head.
- c. A photograph reproduced in Wootten and Stoney, Charleston (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1937), Plate XXI, shows a frontispiece with pilasters and pediment at the main entrance. The accompanying subtitle refers to this as "an example of the successful restorations now being made to such historic buildings in Charleston." This appears to be the frontispiece which is now in place.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

- 1. Architectural character: A dignified Georgian mansion with paneled interiors, mostly in its original state.
- 2. Condition of fabric: The structure appears sound and the materials are in good condition. It has not been occupied for some years, so that the surface finishes have deteriorated; little beyond cleaning and a careful refinishing of interior surfaces appears necessary to put the building in excellent condition.

B. Technical Description of Exterior:

- 1. Over-all dimensions: About 48' x 52'; three stories, facing south.
- 2. Foundations: The ground story is treated as a high basement; its brick walls continue into the foundations without apparent change.
- 3. Wall construction: Brick bearing walls, laid in English bond at the ground story and in Flemish bond above. The bricks are of a type common to Charleston in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; they are called "English brick" locally. They are of a rather dark, dull red color, with brown spots formed by oxidation of particles of iron in the clay. With only slight variation the size is 4-1/8" x 8-3/4" x 2-3/4", laid four courses to one foot. There are 137 courses from the ground to the bottom of the house cornice. At the first-floor level there is a brick base; the wall of the ground story projects several inches beyond the plane of the upper floors.

4. Exterior stairs: At the center of the south facade a masonry stairway of 14 risers leads to the main entrance, with a brick and stucco rail and string which flares out wider toward the lower end. The coping is sandstone. Landing at entrance and treads are of sandstone, with nosing. A brick arch under the landing gives access to a central doorway at the ground story; there is another arch under the stair.

On the north facade a brick and stucco stair extends along the east portion to a central entrance at the first story; an arch under the landing gives access to a central doorway at the ground story.

5. Chimneys: Two large chimneys, stuccoed above the roof, are located slightly north of the center, internally between rooms.
6. Doorways and doors: The main entrance is at the center of the south facade at the first-story level, approached by a monumental stair (see description above). It is emphasized by a slightly projecting center pavilion which includes one bay of windows on each side of the doorway; it extends the entire height of the facade and is crowned by a pedimented gable. The doorway opening has a semicircular brick arch, with a fanlight above the transom bar. The fanlight and door appear to be original, but the frontispiece was applied about thirty years ago, purporting to be a restoration.

Alica R. Huger Smith and D. E. Huger Smith in The Dwelling Houses of Charleston (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1917), pp. 313-314, describe the most probable original design of this doorway: "absolutely plain, without side-lights or ornamentation, and is arched and rather narrow."

The doorway at the first-story level on the north side is plain, with a flat brick arch, rectangular four-light transom, and four-panel door.

Other simple doorways are located at the ground-story level, at the centers of the south and north fronts, at the south corner of the west wall, and the north corner of the east wall.

7. Windows and shutters: Openings are rectangular, with flat brick arches. On the south front, at the two upper floor levels, the window heads are of rubbed brick of small size. They also show traces of paint. Wood double-hung sash, six lights over six lights; heavy wood sills. Some windows retain louvered shutters, with wrought-iron strap hinges, wrought-iron pintles and S-shaped wrought-iron hold-backs (more shutters are stored in the attic).

There are five bays on the south and north facades, and four unevenly spaced bays on the east and west walls. In the south pediment is a round window with four keystones. The circumference of this round window is of rubbed bricks of small size; its four keystones are of brick, stuccoed. Broken window glass has been replaced.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape: Hip roof of low pitch (approximately 6" rise in 12" run).
- b. Framing: 3" x 5-1/2" rafters spaced 18" on centers. Two heavy trusses of hewn timbers extend from north to south, near the center of the attic, approximately over the hall partitions.
- c. Cornice: A wooden cornice with modillions extends around all sides and along the rake of the pediment. Modern sheet-metal gutters are hung beyond this cornice, with round conductors.
- d. Dormers: There are two small hipped dormers on the north side and two on the west side. Dormer sash has been replaced with new sash.

C. Technical Description of Interiors:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Ground floor: The south portion--slightly more than half of the floor area--is one large room, with four columns near the center. Some obviously recent partitions form a small entrance vestibule at the southwest corner. The north portion is divided into two rooms and a central hall containing a stairway which leads to the first story. Ceiling height is 8'-6 3/4".
- b. First floor: A central hall extends north and south, with a stairway in the north end. There are two rooms on either side of the hall, those at the south being larger than the others. Chimneys are located between the north and south rooms, with closets at the inner sides and passageways at the outer sides. Ceiling height is 12'-2".
- c. Second floor: This is similar to the first floor except for a small winding stairway to the attic, in a square compartment alongside the east chimney, and a small central room (hall chamber) at the south. Ceiling height is 12'-7".

d. Attic: Largely open, but finished.

2. Stairways: Main stairway has 20 risers from first to second floor; open string, simple rounded handrail, three 1" x 1" square balusters to each tread. The three by three grouping of balusters is maintained along the railing in the second-floor hall. The lower flight is the longest; there are two landings.

A stairway of 14 risers extends in a straight flight from the ground floor to the first floor; open string, simple rail, two square balusters per tread.

All stair construction is of wood.

3. Flooring: Floor boards are typically of longleaf yellow pine, 5-1/2" to 6" in width, tongued and grooved, on the first and second floors. The attic is floored with wide boards.
4. Interior finish and trim: Some wood trim shows signs of former termite infestation.

On the first and second stories the rooms at the north side have plaster ceilings and walls, with simple wood wainscots and wooden cornice. Window reveals are applied and extend to the floor; doors and windows have wooden architrave trim. Windows have interior paneled shutters. Doors are six-panel, molded. Fireplace mantels have wooden architrave, crossetted, with a plain frieze and simple cornice above. Hearths are of square tiles.

The rooms at the south side on these stories have paneled wood wall finish, cornices have dentils (on second floor only), and the hearths are marble. In other respects they are similar to the ones described above. The paneled walls and other woodwork in the southwest first-story room have been cleaned off. It appears to be of cypress. It is in good condition and sound, although the dado rail and other exposed corners show signs of wear. Some of the more delicate moldings of the wainscot and mantel also show some loss of definition. Hall partitions are frame.

Part of the woodwork in the first-story hall has been cleaned off; this is remarkably clear and sharp, considering the amount of paint which had been applied over the years, which was removed.

The attic is plastered; some breaks in the ceiling reveal split lath.

The large room on the ground floor has four solid wood Greek Doric columns, unfluted; the smaller rooms have fireplaces with simple mantels. Much of the finish on the ground floor appears modern. The hall partitions toward the north side are bearing walls of brick, plastered on the hall side. One old door has vertical boards on one side, diagonal boards on the other.

5. Hardware: Doors are hung, typically on two butts. These appear to be original and have unequal leaves, those attached to the door being the longer. The main entrance door has two very large HL hinges of wrought iron, which appear to be original. Doors on the first and second stories, in general, retain original box locks. Some hardware for bell pulls remains; it appears quite old--perhaps original.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: When built, this house was placed near the center of a four-acre site, approached from Wentworth Street on the south. In 1797 its frontage on Wentworth Street was reduced to 131-1/2', and in the nineteenth century Glebe Street was opened up very close to the west wall of the house [A. and D. Smith, op. cit., pp. 312-313]. At present it occupies an interior lot about 165' on Glebe Street by about 100' in depth, which is not exactly rectangular. The house is thus approached from the west side, instead of the south as it had been originally. The residential neighborhood in which it is now located has been built up during the nineteenth century.
2. Outbuildings: Northeast of the house are remains of some brick foundations which are probably those of an outbuilding. They are not at present sufficiently observable to permit description.

Prepared by Harley J. McKee, Architect
National Park Service
June 1962 and July 1963

Addendum to:

Glebe House (Bishop Robert Smith House)
6 Glebe Street
Charleston
Charleston County
South Carolina

HABS No. SC-261

HABS
SC,
10-CHAR,
169-

PHOTOGRAPHS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C.